United Nations S/2017/175

Security Council

Distr.: General
27 February 2017

Original: English

Letter dated 27 February 2017 from the Secretary-General addressed to the President of the Security Council

I have the honour to transmit herewith the forty-first monthly report of the Director General of the Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons (OPCW), submitted pursuant to paragraph 12 of Security Council resolution 2118 (2013) (see annex). The report covers the period from 23 January to 22 February 2017.

As before, the situation with regard to the destruction of the chemical weapons production facilities declared by the Syrian Arab Republic remains unchanged, with the destruction of three remaining sites yet to be verified by OPCW. The Syrian Arab Republic has informed the Director General that the prevailing security situation continues to prevent safe access to these sites.

With respect to the initial declaration and subsequent submissions of the Syrian Arab Republic, I reiterate the need for the Government of the Syrian Arab Republic and the OPCW Technical Secretariat to continue to work to resolve all outstanding issues. I welcome the continuing cooperation in this regard, which is essential for further progress.

The use of chemical weapons by any party to the conflict in the Syrian Arab Republic is unacceptable. It constitutes a serious violation of international law and a crime against humanity. Those who use chemical weapons must be held to account in order to deter such actions in the future. Impunity must be stopped.

The OPCW Fact-Finding Mission in the Syrian Arab Republic is continuing its efforts to investigate allegations of the use of chemical weapons, including by studying all available information relating to such allegations. In that regard, I recall that the summary update of the activities carried out by the Fact-Finding Mission and its report were transmitted to me by the Director General and subsequently circulated as a document of the Security Council (see S/2017/45).

The OPCW-United Nations Joint Investigative Mechanism submitted its fifth report to the Security Council (see S/2017/131), providing an update on its status and activities undertaken since its previous report, of October 2016 (see S/2016/888). I, in coordination with the Director General of OPCW, intend to reaffirm to the members of the Security Council my support for the work of the Mechanism so that it can continue to conduct its investigations in a professional, independent and impartial manner.

(*Signed*) António **Guterres**

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Annex

[Original: Arabic, Chinese, English, French, Russian and Spanish]

I have the honour to transmit to you my report entitled "Progress in the elimination of the Syrian chemical weapons programme", prepared in accordance with the relevant provisions of OPCW Executive Council decision EC-M-33/DEC.1 and Security Council resolution 2118 (2013), both dated 27 September 2013, for transmission to the Security Council (see enclosure). My report covers the period from 23 January to 22 February 2017 and fulfils the reporting requirements of Executive Council decision EC-M-34/DEC.1, dated 15 November 2013.

(*Signed*) Ahmet **Üzümcü**

Enclosure

[Original: Arabic, Chinese, English, French, Russian and Spanish]

Note by the Director-General

Progress in the elimination of the Syrian chemical weapons programme

Background

1. In accordance with subparagraph 2 (f) of the decision by the Executive Council (hereinafter "the Council") at its Thirty-Third Meeting (EC-M-33/DEC.1, dated 27 September 2013), the Technical Secretariat (hereinafter "the Secretariat") is to report to the Council on a monthly basis regarding the implementation of that decision. In accordance with paragraph 12 of United Nations Security Council resolution 2118 (2013), the report by the Secretariat is also to be submitted to the Security Council through the Secretary-General.

2. The Council, at its Thirty-Fourth Meeting, adopted a decision entitled "Detailed Requirements for the Destruction of Syrian Chemical Weapons and Syrian Chemical Weapons Production Facilities" (EC-M-34/DEC.1, dated 15 November 2013). In paragraph 22 of that decision, the Council decided that the Secretariat should report on its implementation "in conjunction with its reporting required by subparagraph 2 (f) of Council decision EC-M-33/DEC.1".

3. The Council, at its Forty-Eighth Meeting, adopted a decision entitled "Reports of the OPCW Fact-Finding Mission in Syria" (EC-M-48/DEC.1, dated 4 February 2015) noting the Director-General's intent to include reports of the OPCW Fact-Finding Mission (FFM) in Syria, along with information on the Council's discussion thereof, as part of the monthly reporting pursuant to United Nations Security Council resolution 2118 (2013). Similarly, the Council, at its Eighty-First Session, adopted a decision entitled "Report by the Director-General Regarding the Declaration and Related Submissions by the Syrian Arab Republic" (EC-81/DEC.4, dated 23 March 2016), noting the Director-General's intent to provide information on the implementation of that decision.

4. The Council, at its Eighty-Third Session, adopted a decision entitled "OPCW-United Nations Joint Investigative Mechanism Reports on Chemical Weapons Use in the Syrian Arab Republic" (EC-83/DEC.5, dated 11 November 2016). In subparagraph 12 (a) of that decision, the Council decided that the Director-General shall "regularly inform the Council on the implementation of this decision and incorporate information regarding the implementation of this decision into his monthly reporting to the United Nations Security Council, through the United Nations Secretary-General, regarding EC-M-33/DEC.1".

5. This, the forty-first monthly report, is therefore submitted in accordance with the aforementioned Council decisions and includes information relevant to the period from 23 January 2017 to 22 February 2017.

Progress achieved by the Syrian Arab Republic in meeting the requirements of Executive Council decisions EC-M-33/DEC.1 and EC-M-34/DEC.1

6. Progress by the Syrian Arab Republic is as follows:

(a) The Secretariat has verified the destruction of 24 of the 27 chemical weapons production facilities (CWPFs) declared by the Syrian Arab Republic. The Secretariat was informed by the Syrian Arab Republic that the security situation still continues to preclude safe access both for the Syrian Arab Republic to destroy the remaining aircraft hangar, which stands ready to accept the explosive charges, and for the Secretariat to confirm the condition of the two stationary above-ground facilities.

(b) On 15 February 2017, the Syrian Arab Republic submitted to the Council its thirty-ninth monthly report (EC-84/P/NAT.7, dated 15 February 2017) regarding activities on its territory related to the destruction of its CWPFs, as required by paragraph 19 of EC-M-34/DEC.1.

Progress in the elimination of Syrian chemical weapons by States Parties hosting destruction activities

7. As reported previously, all of the chemicals declared by the Syrian Arab Republic that were removed from its territory in 2014 have now been destroyed.

Activities carried out by the Secretariat with respect to Executive Council decision EC-81/DEC.4

8. In decision EC-81/DEC.4, the Council requested the Secretariat, through the Declaration Assessment Team (DAT), to continue its efforts, on an expedited basis, to verify the accuracy and completeness of the Syrian Arab Republic's declaration and related disclosures, and to address the gaps, inconsistencies, and discrepancies it identified in the "Report on the Work of the Declaration Assessment Team Regarding the Declaration and Related Submissions by the Syrian Arab Republic" (EC-81/HP/DG.1, dated 22 February 2016). The Council also requested the Director-General, in parallel with the efforts of the DAT, to report to the Council, at all future sessions, any unresolved issues regarding the Syrian declaration and related submissions.

9. As presented during the briefing to States Parties on 15 February 2017, the DAT continued its work through an exchange of letters with the Syrian Arab Republic.

10. As reported previously, in a letter dated 17 January 2017, the Secretariat shared with the Syrian Arab Republic a matrix setting out, in a summarised form, all outstanding issues related to the Syrian declaration and their current status. This letter also identified a number of documents which, together with other documents listed in previous correspondence, would help to address certain gaps and inconsistencies. The DAT is still awaiting a response from the Syrian Arab Republic.

Other activities carried out by the Secretariat with respect to the Syrian Arab Republic

11. The Steering Committee, which is comprised of representatives from the OPCW, the United Nations Office for Project Services (UNOPS), and the Syrian Arab Republic, will meet in Beirut, Lebanon, on 23 February 2017 to discuss an extension of the support services provided by UNOPS pursuant to the tripartite agreement between UNOPS, the OPCW, and the Government of the Syrian Arab Republic and the contribution agreement between the OPCW and UNOPS, as well as other matters related to the implementation of the activities set out in these agreements.

12. As requested by the Council at its Seventy-Fifth Session (paragraph 7.12 of EC-75/2, dated 7 March 2014), the Secretariat, on behalf of the Director-General, has continued to brief States Parties in The Hague on its activities.

13. As at the cut-off date of this report, one OPCW staff member was deployed as part of the OPCW Mission in the Syrian Arab Republic.

Supplementary resources

14. As previously reported, a Trust Fund for Syria Missions was established in November 2015 to support the FFM and other remaining activities, such as those of the DAT. As at the cut-off date of this report, contribution agreements totalling EUR 7.9 million had been concluded with Canada, Chile, Finland, France, Germany, Monaco, New Zealand, the Republic of Korea, Sweden, Switzerland, the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland, the United States of America, and the European Union.

Activities carried out with respect to the OPCW Fact-Finding Mission in Syria

15. Guided by Council decisions EC-M-48/DEC.1 and EC-M-50/DEC.1 (dated 23 November 2015), as well as United Nations Security Council resolution 2209 (2015), the FFM continued to study all available information relating to the allegations of use of chemical weapons in the Syrian Arab Republic.

16. As reported previously, by letters dated 16 and 29 November 2016, the Syrian Arab Republic requested the FFM to investigate incidents reported to have occurred on 16 September, 31 October, 3 November, and 13 November 2016 in the area of Aleppo. During the reporting period, the FFM continued its work to translate and analyse the records of the 16 interviews conducted during its deployment in December 2016, along with the associated documentation. The samples provided by the Russian Federation to the Syrian Arab Republic and recovered by a team of OPCW experts from the Syrian Scientific Studies and Research Centre (SSRC) at the beginning of January 2017 were sent to two OPCW designated laboratories for analysis. The team will continue to work with the National Authority of the Syrian Arab Republic to gather more information.

17. As presented during the briefing to States Parties on 15 February 2017, eight incidents of alleged use of chemical weapons have been recorded since the beginning of 2017 and are currently being analysed.

18. The activities being carried out by the FFM focus mainly on incidents reported to have occurred in Eastern Aleppo City, western Rif Aleppo, South Homs and North Hama, Rif Damashq, and Idlib. During the reporting period, the FFM team interviewed a number of witnesses related to different allegations. The FFM team continues to face difficulties accessing potential witnesses and will continue to gather additional evidence.

Activities carried out by the Secretariat with respect to Executive Council decision EC-83/DEC.5

19. As explained by the Director-General during the briefing to States Parties on 15 February 2017, the Syrian Arab Republic was notified on 19 January 2017 of a forthcoming inspection at the SSRC, in accordance with paragraph 11 of Council decision EC-83/DEC.5. The deployment, which was cleared by the United Nations Department of Safety and Security, was postponed until further notice on 27 January 2017 following a telephone call and the receipt of a note verbale from the Syrian Arab Republic stating that the Syrian National Authority was unable to receive the team of inspectors due to "safety and security matters".

20. On 30 January 2017, the Director-General briefed the Bureau of the Council regarding the postponement of the planned inspection of the SSRC facilities, and shared a non-paper prepared by the Secretariat which summarised the issues and actions taken to date. The Director-General consulted with the Syrian Arab Republic, including with H.E. Dr Faisal Mekdad, Deputy Foreign Minister of the Syrian Arab Republic, in relation to the postponed inspection. The Director-General again briefed the Bureau of the Council and provided an updated non-paper on the matter on 7 February 2017.

21. The Syrian Arab Republic informed the Secretariat, by note verbale dated 10 February 2017, that new dates would be proposed for the inspection, depending on the security assessment. The inspection team remains on standby pending new agreed dates for the inspection. The Secretariat will continue to consult with the Syrian Arab Republic in order to help it fulfil its obligations under EC-83/DEC.5.

Conclusion

22. The main focus of the future activities of the OPCW Mission in the Syrian Arab Republic will be on the implementation of Council decisions EC-83/DEC.5 and EC-81/DEC.4 and on the activities of the FFM, as well as on the destruction and verification of the remaining aircraft hangar, confirmation of the status of the two stationary above-ground facilities, and annual inspections of the underground structures already verified as destroyed.